

Chief Flynn's Remarks from Swearing-In Ceremony

6 January 2012

Second Term Oath of Office Ceremony Remarks

Milwaukee Police Chief Edward A. Flynn

Mayor Barrett, Council President Hines, Executive Director Tobin: Thank you for your supportive words. Thank you, members of the Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission for the renewed support and confidence you have expressed in me by appointing me to a second term. I said it four years ago and I repeat today, I will not let you down.

Today, just a few miles away from where we stand, Officer Frank Vrtochnick lies in a hospital bed recovering from grievous injuries he received on Christmas when his squad was struck by a reckless driver. Mercifully, he is out of intensive care but his wounds will take time to heal. I thank him for his service and thank his parents, Aggie and Frank, who are with us here today, for raising such a fine son.

Twice a year, the Milwaukee Police Department recognizes the courage of its officers. It has been my privilege to award to our brave men and women seven Medals of Honor, 12 Purple Valors for wounds received in action, twelve Combat Valor Awards, 31 Rescue Valor Awards, 42 Life Saving Awards and literally hundreds of other awards for Distinguished Police Service, Excellence in Police Service and Meritorious Service. Because of them, because of their courage and competence, their integrity and leadership, their respect and restraint the City of Milwaukee is a demonstrably safer place today than it was four years ago. You won't see their pictures on the front page of the newspaper, you won't see a multi-part series describing their exploits. But you will see them on the streets of your neighborhood protecting you every single day. I am proud of them. Every family member, every neighbor, every resident of this city is proud of them. And should be!

Four years ago, standing before you in these chambers, I made bold promises. I promised we would reduce the levels of crime, fear and disorder in the city. I promised that we would be community-based, problem-oriented and data-driven. I made a series of commitments to the commanders, the supervisors, and the officers of the Milwaukee Police

Department and I set out expectations. I also promised the community an open, accountable, accessible police department responsive to its concerns.

Why was I so confident? Because I know and respect cops. The Milwaukee Police Department had been through some hard times. It had taken hits. There appeared to be some estrangement between it and some of its constituencies. Violent crime was a nagging problem. Technology was either obsolescent or awaiting implementation. But I knew I could count on the cops. I could count on their fundamental sense of duty, their ideals. I knew also that within the ranks of the department were people waiting for the chance to show what they could do, waiting for the opportunity to put the agency they had devoted their lives to on the path to greatness.

I said we were going to get to work. And we did. The men and women of your police department stepped up, and they stepped it up. Dramatic changes occurred in a dramatically short period of time. And dramatic results have been achieved.

Every single year, there has been a reduction in overall crime. For twenty years, the average number of murdered Milwaukeeans was 127. In the past four years, that average has been reduced to 81. The Milwaukee Police Department, working with its community partners, has reduced the number of property and violent crime victims in this city by 17, 700 in just four years.

This has not been an accident. A department full of hard-working, talented people committed to their community has made it happen.

Four years ago I said that the measure of our success would be results, not just activity. We've made deliberate choices. The public spaces had been abandoned to criminals. The only way to take them back was to create time for officers to be proactive, not just reactive. Rapid response to non-emergency calls would have to be secondary to saving lives, preventing crime and the reclaiming of public space. Foot patrols dramatically increased. Bicycle patrols were doubled. Squads did park and walks. Roll calls in the street were conducted. Officers now had time to stop suspicious vehicles and confront suspicious pedestrians. Has there been a slight increase in average response time? Yes.

In the meantime, motor vehicle stops increased by 243%, pedestrian stops increased by 324%. I believe it's reasonable to assert that has something to do with saved lives and reduced crime.

But for officers to be proactive, they had to have accurate and timely information. They needed the technological tools to maximize their effectiveness. So the computer information system, with the help of an engaged private sector, was completely overhauled. As a result, for the first time in its history, MPD had access to up to the minute crime data on a daily basis. Every day, crime analysis meetings take place discussing patterns and trends of crime and adjusting deployments. Squads are equipped with Rapid ID units which allow them to verify the identity of suspects in the field. There are five times as many in-squad videos as there had been. Special vehicles have been assigned to the districts equipped with technology that allows them to scan hundreds of license plates checking for warrants and recovering stolen cars. Finally, an obsolete radio system has been replaced by one that is state of the art. Our implementation challenges have been well documented. But we stand as the first city in the nation to have implemented such a system while at the same time making sure that every officer in a field assignment has their own, personal hand held radio. Another first for the department.

I promised the community we would orient ourselves to their needs. We redrew the police district boundaries to align more specifically with neighborhood boundaries. We reorganized the Criminal Investigations Bureau along geographic lines, as well, to reinforce our community policing efforts. An emphasis on neighborhoods, coupled with the production of more useful analytical data, has enabled us to focus on the 10% of offenders who commit 50% of crimes and the 10% of locations that generate 60% of our crime numbers using not only district resources but the drive and commitment of our Neighborhood Task Force. The NTF consists of what used to be independent specialty units, productive but self-deployed. Now, driven by data, they are a core component of neighborhood safety and a mobile tactical resource of great value to our strategic vision.

While significant strategic and technological change was introduced and implemented so too was organizational change. We have committed ourselves to the notion that every officer is and must be a leader. The principal of dispersed leadership requires every officer to accept responsibility, not only for their own actions, but for those of their peers. It

requires all of us to recognize we are responsible for our own morale and for the reputation of our police department. The introduction of the Leadership in Police Organization model has been a driver of internal cultural change. Coupled with policy modifications and the introduction of a Code of Conduct based on our core values, we have seen improvements in the professional behavior of our officers. Citizen complaints, despite a vast increase in proactive police activity, are down nearly 40%. Use of force incidents have been reduced by 9% and vehicle pursuits are down 66%. All are tributes to the discipline and restraint of our officers, as well as showing the high degree of community support that exists for their efforts.

When I took command of this agency I not only knew that I could count on the cops I also knew I needed to depend on the supervisory and command officers. I relied on my experience that within every department there are those commanders waiting to be given the opportunity to get it right. So from the very beginning, I didn't just empower them in some theoretical sense. I gave the specific strategic direction and told them to develop the tactics. They would implement the vision with the tools at their disposal. Working hard and late into many nights, it was those officers in the command ranks who operationalized and legitimized our strategy. Our success is in no small sense a tribute to their tenacity and sincerity of purpose.

The days of Lone Ranger policing are long past. No police department can be effective for long with viable and active community and government partners. Our officers have forged productive collaborations with numerous community-based organizations. We believe the Community Prosecution partnership we have formed with the Milwaukee County District Attorney and the problem-solving partnership we have formed with the Milwaukee Department of Neighborhood Services Special Enforcement section are national models for the abatement of community nuisances and long-term issues.

The Milwaukee Police Department has achieved national prominence in its profession in a short time.

We are part of a project with the Urban Institute, studying how to employ field stops in a way that doesn't endanger community support. John Jay College of Criminal Justice is working with us on an offender re-entry project. Harvard's Kennedy School of Government has published a study referencing our reorganization of the detective bureau in support of community policing. Yale University Law School, funded by the Bureau of

Justice Assistance is studying how the police department is building community trust in order to co-produce neighborhood safety. Finally, both the Police Executive Research Forum and the International Association of Chiefs of Police are using the MPD as research partners in a number of grant applications they are seeking.

I promised much four years ago. But the men and women of this police department delivered that which was promised and much more. Their, and your police department is more effective, has more community support, is more technologically advanced, more transparent, more engaged with its neighborhoods, more restrained in the use of force and the subject of less complaint than at any time in recent history. Be proud of your sons and daughters. They deserve no less.

The MPD vision statement is “a Milwaukee where all can live safely and without fear, protected by a police department with the highest ethical and professional standards.” Our mission is “in partnership with the community we will create and maintain neighborhoods capable of civic life.” The control of crime, fear and disorder are but means to this vital end.

We know we're not done. We'll never be done. But we will never stop improving. We will never stop trying. We are the police and this city depends upon us. There's still too much crime. There are still too many victims. In too many neighborhoods, fear still reigns. But we are here for you.

Milwaukee faces challenges. We Milwaukeeans, will face them together. We can not count on federal support. We can't count on state support. We can't count on anyone but each other. I'm grateful for the financial support shown by Mayor Barrett and the Common Council. Because of their efforts, MPD has an academy class while other similar cities around the country are laying off officers. I pledge to you that we will deliver you results, and be prudent stewards of the public trust and public funds.

To the residents of Milwaukee, I pledge the department to continued partnership. Where there is crime, we will be there for you. Where there is fear, we will be there with you. Where disorder threatens, we will be there with you. We will never abandon you. Every man and woman in this department pledges to put themselves in harms way on your behalf.

Much has been done. Much more needs to be done. And we're going to get it done. Together. Now, let's get back to work!